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ABSTRACT

Methods that secondary school social studies teachers could use to help students master skills needed for effective reading and comprehension of social studies materials are presented. Surveys of recent literature on teaching reading skills and results of the author's interviews with 91 selected social studies teachers indicate that secondary school social studies teachers have definite responsibilities toward teaching reading. A summary of the teachers' suggestions for effective methods of teaching social studies reading skills is presented. These stress the teacher's role in helping students grasp main ideas and relevant details, master special social studies vocabulary and concepts, use textbooks and references effectively, set purposes for reading, and learn to read critically. Teachers also should provide materials appropriate for the course and for the students' reading level. Because this study was conducted with selected teachers in a limited geographic area, the author recommends that further study be done by other researchers on the same topic with other teachers and in different geographic areas. (Author/AV)

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SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING EFFECTIVELY THE SPECIAL READING SKILLS NEEDED IN SECONDARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES

By E. Dale Davis

The purpose of this study was to determine practices or methods that secondary school social studies teachers could use to help their students master special skills needed for effectively reading and comprehending printed materials in their classes.

It was the author's hypothesis that capable, experienced teachers who had also received advanced training in the teaching of reading could suggest specific practices or methods which would be worthy of consideration by other teachers working in secondary schools.

Significance of the Problem

In many school systems reading instruction in the elementary grades is the only training received by most students. The instructional program generally places emphasis on the reading of narrative or simple factual material, and it is often terminated at the end of the fourth or sixth grade. Beyond the elementary school level, training in how to read is mostly optional and dependent upon the individual teacher's recognition of his students' needs. For that reason there are many students in the secondary school social studies

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classes who have had little, if any, instruction in the reading skills needed for effective reading and study in this content area of the curriculum.[1]

Many reading specialists state that it is safe to estimate that at the tenth grade level, in a class where I. Q.'s often range from 85 to 140 and where the average age is 15, there will probably be eight grade levels of reading ability represented in that class. The teacher is confronted with the challenge of teaching these students social studies often with only one textbook and a limited amount of reference material. Thus, since most learning in secondary school social studies classrooms is through the use of textbooks, reading skills become the "common denominator" of learning in such classrooms.[2] Herber points out that many high school students have difficulty in social studies, not necessarily because they are unable to read, but because they do not have the reading skills essential for reading effectively in that content area or any of the major content areas.[3]

Definitions and Limitations

There are no unusual terms used in this study, but for the sake of clarity the following commonplace ones are defined.

Methods.--The term methods is used in this study to describe what the teacher of social studies can do to influence the effectiveness of learning on the part of students, especially the learning of reading skills in social studies classes.

Secondary social studies teacher.--A person who teaches social studies in a middle school, a junior high, or a high

school is a secondary social studies teacher.

Social studies class.--In this study social studies class means a class in United States history, world history, government, civics, sociology, or economics taught in a secondary school.

This report is part of a study which was conducted in the fall of 1976 by the author using a research grant given to him by Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas. The study was limited to 91 teachers interviewed and to certain printed materials found in Fondren Library on the Southern Methodist University campus, the University of Oklahoma Library, and the library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Resumé of Related Literature

Since this study was concerned primarily with the ideas and practices of the selected teachers being studied, only a brief summary of some of the more pertinent research of outstanding educators in the field of reading will be presented.

As was mentioned above, in many school systems basal reading instruction is the only training given to most students. After the elementary grades training in how to read is mostly dependent upon the individual teacher's recognition of students' needs and the teacher's ability and willingness to meet those needs.[4] It is often the student's reading ability which ultimately will be the crucial factor to his success or failure in school. Every teacher in every content area classroom is dealing with materials the student must read. Therefore, each content area teacher is an

instructor of reading materials, and this means that the social studies teacher will have many opportunities to help students who are reading the required printed materials in his course.[5]

In times past many social studies teachers either felt unable to help in the area of reading instruction or that it was not their responsibility. Fortunately, many of them now believe that they can and must help students with the reading skills needed in their classrooms. They attempt to make reading instruction an integral part of their teaching.[6]

Ruth Strang believed that even proficiency in general reading skills was not enough for success in social studies classes. She pointed out on many occasions that students needed a technical vocabulary and special skills in each of the content areas.[7] This, of course, does not mean that the teacher is to abandon his major responsibility which is to help students learn the content of the particular subject he is teaching. On the other hand, to teach content effectively, the teacher must be aware of the varying needs and abilities of his pupils and provide instruction in the reading skills which are demanded by the content.

Marksheffel points out that every social studies teacher must accept the responsibility of aiding students with the problems they encounter in textbook reading.[8] While special reading teachers might provide some assistance, the responsibility for helping students read materials in the content areas should not be delegated to the reading specialist. With few exceptions the subject matter teacher is the best qualified individual for giving reading instruc-

tion in social studies classes.[9] This is true because through his interest, preparation, and education he is an expert or specialist in his field. It is he who has acquired the background in the vocabulary, concepts, and generalizations which is necessary for intelligent instruction in this area. The social studies teacher should be the most capable of helping students learn to pronounce new words, to understand new concepts, to determine the crucial parts of material which require slow, thoughtful reading and those areas which need only skimming or a rapid reading.[10]

Research studies and reading specialists have set forth many strategies for improving the reading skills of students in secondary school social studies. The following are some of the ones most often stressed:

1. Help students master skills in locating, evaluating, and using information and make certain that reading materials are appropriate for the different reading levels of the students.[11]

2. Provide knowledge of and practice in using the different parts of the social studies texts.[12]

3. Teach students how to use the survey SQ3R method.[13]

4. Teach pupils how to detect, understand, and retain major ideas and relevant details.[14]

5. Take time to help students acquire an understanding of concepts of time and space, the chronology of eras and events, the relationships between past and present, and cause-effect relationships.[15]

6. Group pupils in the classroom and differentiate instruction. Provide differentiated material when necessary.[16]

7. When possible, help students learn to use ideas and information to deal with significant personal and social problems.[17]

8. Enhance the understanding and retention of ideas and concepts encountered when reading social studies materials by setting definite purposes for reading; for example, reading to answer a question, to find a specific detail, to evaluate a particular statement, or to determine the general significance of an article.[18]

9. Teach students to apply the higher level critical reading skills when reading social studies material.

10. Help students gain knowledge and skill in the use of charts, tables, graphs, maps, globes, and other pictorial or graphic presentations for aid in acquiring an understanding of social studies concepts.[19]

11. Help students learn to discriminate between fact and opinion and to choose valid conclusions and make sound inferences and generalizations.

12. Help students learn to deal with lengthy complex sentences in paragraphs which are packed with concepts.

13. Teach students how to weigh the reliability of different statements, make comparisons and contrasts, and put an idea in one's own words without changing the meaning of the printed material.[20]

Research Procedures

The research plan used in this study involved the following steps:

1. A brief survey of the recent educational literature dealing with the teaching of special reading skills needed

in secondary school social studies.

2. Interviews with 91 social studies teachers who had taught at least three years in a secondary school and who had also taken at least two graduate level courses in the teaching of reading.

During the course of the interview the teachers were asked to complete the following short questionnaire:

THE SECONDARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER'S ROLE IN TEACHING EFFECTIVELY THE SPECIAL READING SKILLS NEEDED IN SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Your school system is _____

2. Your Sex: Male____ Female _____

3. Number of years you have taught in secondary schools ____

4. Highest degree held _____

5. Have you completed two or more courses in reading at the graduate level? Yes ____ No ____

6. Do you have a master's degree in reading? Yes ___ No ___

7. Are you certified as a reading teacher? Yes ___ No ___

8. Are you now enrolled in a reading specialist program? Yes ___ No ___

9. If you have a master's degree in an area other than reading, please state the area. _____

10. Do you feel that it is the responsibility of the secondary school social studies teacher to teach students the special reading skills needed in social studies? Yes ___ No ___

11. If your answer was no to number ten, would you please state why you feel this way on the first blank page attached to this questionnaire? If your answer was yes, would you take a few minutes and state on the first and second blank pages attached to this questionnaire the most effective

approaches or methods you believe the secondary social studies teachers can use to teach the special reading skills needed in their classes? Try to list at least five promising approaches or methods, but do not list over ten.

The teachers responding to the questionnaire in the interviews were from the following school systems:

Dallas, Texas	15	Augusta, Georgia	2
Fort Worth, Texas	6	Columbia, South Carolina	4
Greenville, Texas	3	Ardmore, Oklahoma	1
Houston, Texas	5	Norman, Oklahoma	3
Kilgore, Texas	2	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	4
Longview, Texas	2	Cumberland County, N. C.	2
Nacogdoches, Texas	2	Durham, N. C.	3
Richardson, Texas	6	Fayetteville, N. C.	3
San Antonio, Texas	5	Raleigh, N. C.	5
Sherman, Texas	2	Robeson County, N. C.	4
Atlanta, Georgia	8	Wake County, N. C.	4

Analysis of Data

Analysis of data taken from the questionnaires revealed the following information. There were 23 males and 68 females in the population studied. The mean number of years of teaching experience in secondary schools for the teachers responding was 9.7 years. Seventy nine per cent indicated they held a master's degree, and 21 per cent stated they were holders of a bachelor's degree. All of the teachers studied had completed at least two graduate level courses in reading. Eighteen of the females and two of the males held a master's degree in reading. Twelve of the females holding a master's degree in reading were also certified as reading teachers.

None of the males were so certified. Eleven of the teachers indicated they were now enrolled in reading specialist programs. Thirty eight of those studied had a master's degree in secondary education, three in government, seven in history, and one in sociology. All of the teachers studied checked the yes blank to the question: Do you feel that it is the responsibility of the secondary school social studies teacher to teach students the special reading skills needed in social studies? This is not surprising since 34 per cent of the teachers were members of either a state association of reading teachers or the International Reading Association. It is also true that the researcher studied only teachers who had been recommended for the study by either a school principal, counselor, consultant, or departmental head as a person who was an "outstanding" teacher and also a person who had taken at least two courses in reading at the graduate level. The purpose of the study demanded such persons.

Question number eleven asked the teachers to state the most effective approaches or methods they believed the secondary social studies teacher can use to teach the special reading skills needed in their classes. The ten approaches most often stated are given below. The exact wording of each response was carefully studied, classifed, and then summarized into a general statement which would convey the meaning of the various responses even though the verbatim wording of each teacher's statements could not, of course, be given here. Three certified reading specialists helped the author classify and summarize the responses. Number one was listed the greatest number of times; number two was the next most

frequently stated on through number ten below. The results were as follows:

1. Help students learn the special vocabulary and technical terminology in social studies. Explain the new vocabulary and concepts introduced in new chapters and units--listed 83 times.

2. Help students acquire skills in locating, using, and evaluating information for specific purposes--79 times.

3. Make assignments clear and reasonable. Use long range assignments at times. Give students instructions in the use of appropriate references needed to complete assignments--listed 70 times.

4. Help students acquire an understanding of the relationships between past and present and cause-effect relationships--65 times.

5. Early in the school year take time to introduce the textbook and provide knowledge of and practice in using the different parts of the book effectively--61 times.

6. Help students learn to read for the main ideas, supporting details, different points of view, and to identify causes--55 times.

7. Determine the reading level of your students and of the textbooks and other printed materials you are using. Provide plenty of materials for students who read below grade level and for those who read on and above the grade level--53 times.

8. Make sure the course is not restricted to a single textbook. Encourage students to read materials related to major topics--47 times.

9. Teach students to evaluate what they read, to differentiate between factual and editorial writing, and to identify false generalizations and distortions of truth--42 times.

10. Help pupils become efficient in critical reading by providing practice in identifying bias, prejudice, and propaganda techniques--38 times.

Summary and Recommendations

The survey of related recent literature on teaching reading skills needed in secondary school social studies and the results of this researcher's interviews with selected social studies teachers and analysis of the responses to the questionnaire used in this study seem to verify the following:

1. Literature on the topic definitely indicates that the secondary school teacher of social studies has responsibilities in the area of teaching reading.

2. The teachers who participated in this study all indicated they felt that teaching special reading skills in social studies classes should be an area of concern for teachers.

3. The related literature and the results of the interviews indicated that the most effective ways for teaching the special reading skills needed in secondary school social studies are very similar and revolve around the following:

   a. Help students grasp and retain main ideas and relevant details.

   b. Help students master special vocabulary, terminology, and social studies concepts.

   c. Help students use textbooks and references effec-

tively.

d. Help students set purposes for reading.

e. Help students learn to read critically.

f. Help students learn to use pictorial and graphic materials effectively in learning new concepts.

g. Provide materials which are appropriate for the course and for the students' reading level.

The author believes his hypothesis, that capable, experienced teachers who had also received advanced training in the teaching of reading could suggest specific practices or methods which would be worthy of consideration by other teachers working in social studies in secondary schools, was verified in this particular study with the specific teachers involved.

The author recommends that further study be done by other researchers on this topic with other teachers and in different geographic areas.

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